2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

622 651 643

formed only one element in the relationship of mutual interdependence between subject and chief by which the commoner, in return for accepting the political authority of his ruler, gained complete security as to his rights of occupying any amount of land he could use. He still has this security to-day, and can still be certain of the right to use his land in any way he pleases, except of course by selling it.

Land Tenure and Political Organization.

The political organization of the Bemba is based very directly upon this system of land tenure as is the case in most Bantu societies. The *umulasa* system makes for tribal cohesion in a sparsely populated district, because it emphasizes the unity of the village community and brings the people in direct personal contact with their chief—possibly their only opportunity of meeting him during the year. For the young at any rate, the week spent at the capital is an education in the political machinery of the tribe, and a means by which the authority of the chief and his council is displayed. The bringing of tribute to the *umusumba* could not be defended on the grounds of economic efficiency alone. It is a common sight to see, for instance, meat brought a two days' journey from one part of an *icalo* and distributed in a rather high condition, to *umulasa* labourers from another, and the inhabitants of a village who brought a basket of millet as tribute to the chief, at one time of the year, might consume an almost identical amount of grain in the form of porridge when next arriving at the capital to do their *umulasa* labour. But where the economic life of the people is so clearly dominated by the political, the exaction of these dues on land has an important secondary function in maintaining authority in the tribe.

622 651 647 643

It is also obvious that it is the chief's right to tribute and labour that gives him sufficient surplus food to feed his servants, his executive officials, his panel of legal advisers, and his tribal council. Some of these live at the capital but do not willingly give their days to hearing cases unless the chief gives them beer or food.[1] Others come from long distances, and will only spend the necessary fortnight or three weeks at the *umusumba* if they are fed. Without a full granary the chief is apt to find his whole civil service, if we may

[1] Since my visit a payment of £1 a year to twenty-five of the *bakabilo* has been instituted. 'Pim Report,' p. 188.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

643 622 651 [647]

so call it, melt away. Besides this, his prestige will gradually go when he is no longer able to carry out his obligations on the same scale as before. The situation has in fact reached a kind of impasse at the moment. Because the *mfumu* gets less labour, he makes smaller gardens and has less food to feed his workers, so that they in their turn are less willing to serve him another year. From figures I collected during my visit it was clear that in some capitals the labourers were getting no food at all in return for their work. The late Nkula employed a hunter, and had a reputation for giving his people meat. Consequently he always seemed able to get work done for him. Sub-chief Lucembe was a hunter himself and lived in good game country. He was therefore in a fortunate position. But Citimukulu sometimes sent men away without food, or gave them one meal in two days, while the women were supposed to bring their own supplies and cook for themselves. Mukuikile, a sub-chief in the Mpika district, fed the men, but not the women. It is clear from these instances that the modern chief is no longer able to carry out his obligations to his people. Those who grumble at the chief's lack of hospitality have reason on their side, but to refuse to do their service as a protest increases the difficulty.

622 574 657 643

As a second result, many chiefs now fail to keep their panel of advisers and councillors at court to transact the necessary tribal business. I have seen the Citimukulu hear cases alone with his clerk, and during 1934 the *bakabilo* summoned by him on important matters of business invariably melted away before the end of the meeting because they had not enough food. It took a period of three months of alternately summoning the council and then dismissing it because of shortage, before the work could be carried through.

622 644 643

Chiefs are also beginning perforce to refuse food to the hungry, and even to their poor relations. In January 1934 Citimukulu gave up the distinction between his *umulasa* granary and his personal one, and fed his wife and family on anything he could lay hands on. The right to take food from the royal mounds (*mputa*) already limited to near relatives, was still further curtailed. In July 1933 I heard the guardian of the Paramount's granary walk round the village at night shouting, 'Listen everyone! Hunger has fallen! No one is to dig up cassava from the chief's *mputa*. If he is hungry let him come to the chief and make obeisance and he will be given something.' It is true that this failure of commissariat occurred during a year when the locusts had done their maximum damage and in

622 657 643